

**American Bird Conservancy * Audubon * Center for Biological Diversity
Coalition of National Park Service Retirees
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship * Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental Protection Information Center * Klamath Forest Alliance
National Parks Conservation Association * Natural Resources Defense Council
Sierra Club * Southern Environmental Law Center * The Wilderness Society**

February 5, 2014

Members of Congress
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: **Please Protect Cape Hatteras by Voting “NO” on H.R. 2954**

Dear Representative:

We are urging you to vote “NO” on H.R. 2954 due to a provision that overturns a multi-year public process that achieved balance between sea turtle and shorebird protection and beach driving at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The provision would eliminate a National Park Service rule developed during four years of negotiation and public participation in favor of far less protection for the national seashore known for its incredible wildlife and family vacations. In 2012 and 2013, the first years of management under the NPS’s Final Rule, visitation to the Seashore increased, tourism set record highs, and wildlife on the seashore rebounded.

The Final Rule currently in place is a success story – one that Congress should support by voting against H.R.2954.

It is no coincidence that in the two years under the Final Rule and the four years prior to that when similar reasonable restrictions on beach driving were in place, tourism thrived and revenues grew. Of the eight villages located within Cape Hatteras National Seashore, seven are on Hatteras Island. Occupancy revenue for the Hatteras Island villages (a publicly available indicator of the strength of their tourism industry) has been higher under the Final Rule than prior years. The first year under the Final Rule—2012 – saw record-setting occupancy revenue that was seven percent higher than in 2007 (the year that the Interim Strategy, which H.R. 2954 would reinstate, was in effect). Hatteras Island set an even higher record in 2013.

Wildlife has thrived as well. Sea turtle nests on national seashore beaches have more than tripled from 82 in 2007 to a record 254 in 2013. Two bird species that had disappeared from Cape Hatteras National Seashore have now returned to breed there. The protections in the Final Rule are based on an extraordinary amount of scientific evidence, including peer-reviewed protocols developed by the U.S. Geological Survey, and the support of scientists at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission.

The Final Rule provides a balanced approach to Seashore visitation. Informed by numerous public meetings and more than 21,000 written comments (most in favor of even stronger pedestrian and

wildlife protections), the rule designates 41 of the Seashore's 67 miles for off-road vehicle (ORV) use. It designates only 26 miles of beaches as year-round vehicle-free areas – to promote pedestrian access, provide safe beaches for families and visitors who prefer vehicle-free beaches, and reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses of the national seashore.

The Final Rule currently in place closes beaches in the limited times and places necessary to protect sensitive wildlife from disturbance, primarily during the breeding season. Rare species of shorebirds and federally threatened and endangered sea turtles have rebounded from historic lows. They are protected only when and where they need it the most and once the young birds have learned to fly, the areas are re-opened to ORVs. Areas are closed for sea turtle nests only in the few days immediately preceding the expected hatch date and then re-opened after hatching.

The National Park Service intensely manages this national park unit in order to allow ORV use on most of the seashore while successfully protecting natural resources. The National Park Service should be allowed to continue their balanced and successful management of Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Please oppose the H. R. 2954 and allow the successful management of competing uses and the economically beneficial regulation currently in place at Cape Hatteras to continue.

Sincerely,

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